

any question to the Commission for its consideration and disposition;

(9) To submit an initial or recommended decision in accordance with §§ 3001.38 and 3001.39; and

(10) To take any other action necessary or appropriate to the discharge of the duties vested in them, consistent with the statutory or other authorities under which the Commission functions and with the rules, regulations, and policies of the Commission.

(b) *Conduct of hearings.* It is the duty of the presiding officer to conduct a fair and impartial hearing and to maintain order. Any disregard by participants or counsel of his/her rulings on matters of order and procedure shall be noted on the record, and where he/she deems it necessary shall be made the subject of a special written report to the Commission. In the event that participants or counsel should be guilty of disrespectful, disorderly, or contumacious language or conduct in connection with any hearing, the presiding officer immediately may submit to the Commission his/her report thereon, together with his/her recommendations, and in his/her discretion, suspend the hearing.

(c) *Ex parte communication.* Except to the extent required for the disposition of ex parte matters as authorized by law and by the rules of the Commission, no presiding officer shall, in any proceeding in which the Commission may so direct, or in any proceeding required by statute to be determined on the record after opportunity for hearing, consult any person on any matter in issue unless upon notice and opportunity for all participants to be heard.

(d) *Disqualification.* A presiding officer may withdraw from a proceeding when he/she deems himself disqualified, or may be withdrawn by the Commission for good cause found after timely affidavits alleging personal bias or other disqualifications have been filed.

[36 FR 396, Jan. 12, 1971, as amended at 49 FR 6490, Feb. 22, 1984; 51 FR 8827, Mar. 14, 1986; 58 FR 38976, July 21, 1993]

§ 3001.24 Prehearing conferences.

(a) *Initiation and purposes.* In any proceeding the Commission or the presiding officer may, with or without motion, upon due notice as to time and

place, direct the participants in a proceeding to appear for a prehearing conference for the purposes of considering all possible ways of expediting the proceeding, including those in paragraph (d) of this section. It is the intent of the Commission to issue its recommended decision or advisory opinion on requests under sections 3622, 3623, and 3661 of the Act with the utmost practicable expedition. The Commission directs that these prehearing procedures shall be rigorously pursued by the presiding officer and all participants to that end.

(b) *Informal off-the-record procedures.* In order to make the prehearing conference as effective as possible, the presiding officer may, in his/her discretion, direct that conferences be held off the record at the beginning of a prehearing conference or at other appropriate times, without the presiding officer being present. Such informal off-the-record conferences shall be presided over by the Commission's officer designated to represent the interests of the general public or such other person as the participants may select. At such off-the-record conferences the participants shall be expected to reach agreement on those matters which will expedite the proceeding, including the matters specified in the notice of the prehearing conference, in the ruling of the presiding officer directing that the off-the-record conference be held and in paragraph (d) of this section. A report on the results of such off-the-record conference shall be made to the presiding officer on the record at a time specified by the presiding officer and he/she shall then determine the further prehearing procedures to be followed.

(c) *Required preparation and cooperation of all parties.* All participants in any proceeding before the Commission are required and expected to come to the prehearing conference fully prepared to discuss in detail and resolve all matters specified in paragraph (d) of this section, and notice of the prehearing conference, and such other notice or agenda as may have been issued by the Commission or the presiding officer. All participants are required and expected to cooperate fully at all stages of the proceeding to achieve

these objectives, through thorough advance preparation for the prehearing conference, including informal communications between the participants, requests for discovery and appropriate discovery procedures at the earliest possible time and no later than at the prehearing conference, and the commencement of preparation of evidence and cross-examination. The failure of any participant to appear at the prehearing conference or to raise any matters that could reasonably be anticipated and resolved at the prehearing conference shall not be permitted to unduly delay the progress of the proceeding and shall constitute a waiver of the rights of the participant with regard thereto, including all objections to the agreements reached, actions taken, or rulings issued by the presiding officer with regard thereto.

(d) *Matters to be pursued.* At the prehearing conference in any proceeding, the presiding officer and the participants shall consider and resolve the following matters:

(1) The definition and simplification of the issues including any appropriate explanation, clarification, or amendment of any proposal, filing, evidence, complaint or other pleading filed by any participant;

(2) Arrangement for timely completion of discovery from the Postal Service or any other participant concerning information desired by any participant with regard to any issues in the proceeding or prior filings, evidence or pleadings of any participant;

(3) Agreement as to procedures for timely discovery with regard to any future evidentiary filings of any participant;

(4) Stipulations, admissions or concessions as to evidentiary facts, and agreements as to documentary matters, exhibits and matters of official notice, which will avoid unnecessary proof or dispute;

(5) Grouping parties with substantially like interests for purposes of presenting evidence, making and arguing motions and objections, cross-examining witnesses, filing briefs, and presenting oral argument to the Commissioner or presiding officer;

(6) Disclosure of the number, identity and qualifications of witnesses, and the

nature of their testimony, particularly with respect to the policies of the Act and, as applicable according to the nature of the proceeding, each factor stated in section 3622 or 3623 of the Act;

(7) Limitation of the scope of the evidence and the number of witnesses to eliminate irrelevant, immaterial, or cumulative and repetitious evidence;

(8) Procedures to direct and control the use of discovery prior to the hearing and submission of written testimony and exhibits on matters in dispute so as to restrict to a bare minimum the amount of hearing time required for oral cross-examination of witnesses;

(9) Division of the proceeding where practicable into two or more phases for separate simultaneous hearings;

(10) Fixing dates for the submission and service of such written testimony and exhibits as may be appropriate in advance of the hearing;

(11) Order of presentation of the evidence and cross-examination of witnesses so that the hearing may proceed in the most expeditious and orderly manner possible; and

(12) All other matters which would aid in an expeditious disposition of the proceeding, including consent of the participants to the conduct of the entire proceedings off the record.

(e) *Rulings by presiding officer.* The presiding officer at such prehearing conference, irrespective of the consent of the participants, shall dispose of by ruling (1) any of the procedural matters itemized in paragraph (d) of this section and (2) such other procedural matters on which he/she is authorized to rule during the course of the hearing if ruling at this stage would expedite the proceeding. Either on the record at the conclusion of such prehearing conference, or by order issued shortly thereafter, the presiding officer shall state the agreements reached by the participants, the actions taken, and the rulings made by the presiding officer. Such rulings shall control the subsequent course of the proceedings unless modified at the hearing to prevent manifest injustice.

[36 FR 396, Jan. 12, 1971, as amended at 58 FR 38976, July 21, 1993]